

# Homelessness and Substance Abuse

## Introduction

Homelessness in America is a huge issue and affects almost 600,000 people, according to the [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#). Substance abuse and addiction play huge roles in the lives of people that are homeless. It is often an endless cycle for the people that struggle with this addiction and is hard to break. This backgrounder will address how addiction plays a part in homelessness, discusses how they co-occur, explains the toll of addiction on mental and physical health, and provides resources and ways to get help.

## Overview of Social Issue

Homelessness is defined as “an individual or family who lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation,” according to an article by [SoarWorks](#). Homelessness is widespread across the United States and can attribute to a cycle of problems when exposed to this life.

Addiction is defined as “a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interaction among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences,” according to an article by the [American Society of Addiction Medicine](#). Addiction is a common struggle in the lives of Americans, but it is still very stigmatized.

Homelessness and addiction is a cycle that is extremely hard to end. People that struggle with addiction may end up homeless and people that struggle with homelessness may be exposed to drugs that can lead to addictions. The lack of resources often makes it harder for people to get clean, get jobs, and afford homes.

## Co-occurrence Between Addiction and Homelessness

One-third of people in America that are homeless also struggle with an addiction or substance abuse problem. Addiction is often a result of homelessness. Living in the hard conditions on the street, struggling with food and health, and the high stress of being homeless may lead people to drugs and addictions. In a study by The National Coalition for the Homeless, they found that 55% of homeless are alcohol dependent and 25% are dependent on other substances ([AddictionCenter](#)).

### *Addiction in America*

Addiction can be affected by many different factors. It can be a result of genetics, your environment, or your life experiences. In America, research estimates that genetics account for 40-60% of a person’s likelihood of developing an addiction ([AddictionCenter](#)). People may experience withdrawals after prolonged substance abuse which can also contribute to the dangerous cycle. Statistics show over 20 million Americans (12 or older) have an addiction, 100 people per day die from an overdose, and over 5 million visits a year are often related to drugs or

alcohol ([AddictionCenter](#)). Some of the most common addictions are alcohol, cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and opioids ([AddictionCenter](#)).

### *Homelessness in America*

According to [AddictionCenter](#), homelessness in America is increasing yearly, especially in younger age ranges. Shelters are filling up quicker and people are having a harder time finding resources to help. Homelessness is worse in larger cities where housing is more expensive. People that are experiencing problems with addiction may struggle to get jobs and afford a home, therefore making it a dangerous cycle.

## **Addiction Affects People's Mental and Physical Health**

### *Mental Health*

Addiction plays a huge role in mental health disorders. Roughly 30% of people experiencing homelessness have a serious mental illness. Some of these disorders may include bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or severe anxiety ([SAMHSA](#)). Mental health problems can lead to dependence on drugs or alcohol as a way to escape their mental turmoil. According to [AddictionCenter](#), mental health disorders are more likely to develop addictions. When people are struggling with mental health and addiction, they also may struggle with work, motivation, and personality changes. These can all affect getting and keeping jobs, which may result in homelessness.

### *Physical Health*

Addiction also affects a person's physical health. Drug abuse can cause cardiovascular problems, strokes, respiratory problems, HIV/AIDS, and cancer ([GreenhouseTreatmentCenter](#)). Poor health conditions can affect how well you can work and missing work. Some jobs may be physically demanding and people that struggle with homelessness and addiction may not be able to perform these jobs. Without the ability to work, the dangerous cycle of homelessness starts again.

## **When and Where to Seek Help**

### *When*

Some warning signs for addiction include, taking the substance in larger amounts, having a strong desire to use the substance, issues with responsibilities at work or school, affecting your relationships, developing tolerance, and experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

### *Where*

Resources:

- SAMHSA'S National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP)
- American Addiction Centers Helpline (888-986-9280)
- Alcohol.org
- Recovery.org
- Rehabs.com
- Drugabuse.com
- Addiction-treatment.com

## **Conclusion**

Homelessness is a hard-to-end cycle. It may begin with an addiction, that leads to poor health, that may lead to the inability to work and afford a home. Without the right resources and ways to help, people in America will never recover.

## **References**

[American Addiction Centers](#)

[AddictionCenter](#)

[American Society of Addiction Medicine](#)

[GreenhouseTreatmentCenter](#)

[Michael's House](#)

[National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

[National Library of Medicine](#)

[SAMHSA](#)

[SoarWorks](#)